

- Michelle Harven: [00:04](#) This is Force for Hire a deep dive into private military contracting and how it's transforming the battlefield. I'm Michelle Harven and I'm Desmon Farris. This is our final episode in the series and we are wrapping it up this season, uh, with a look at the future of the industry. So we're addressing some other issues we didn't get to along the way and we're just going to give sort of our final thoughts. And there are just so many topics that we didn't get to because this topic is so large and unwieldy. It's most of the time, it's why we had to explain what we even meant when we said private military contractors,
- Desmon Farris: [00:39](#) right? The deeper we dove, the actual more we found out was actually involved in this community, in this career field as a private military contractor.
- Michelle Harven: [00:49](#) What was really cool about exploring this topic is that when we went into it, we found out that there were so many other layers to it. And I think one of the biggest misconceptions about it is that it's conflated to mean so many different things. We have people in Western businesses doing logistics, people working in food halls and IT, and then we have security teams in the field. And then to complicate it even further, we have actual mercenary type fighters in places like Russia. And it's complicating what we mean when we say private military contracting.
- Desmon Farris: [01:26](#) When talking about Western PMC companies, wasn't there one question that kept coming up?
- Michelle Harven: [01:31](#) Yes. So this question of cost effectiveness kept on coming up because it's one of those key questions in contracting, is it worth it? Is this something that the military is actually saving their money on? And so what was interesting about it as well is that no one could agree on it. So this was addressed in our very first episode with David Eisenberg, who is a journalist who's been looking at this industry for much of his career. And I really loved his response to this question.
- David Eisenberg: [01:58](#) Well it's like the question of beauty. I mean beauty is in the, eye of the beholder and so is cost effectiveness. It really comes down to what do you consider to be a benefit and what do you consider

to be a cost and people count those in different ways. When that day comes, when everybody is agreed, what does it cost in benefit and they've all agreed to count the exact basket of cost and benefits for you know, equivalent private and public sector units, then maybe we'll have an answer. Hasn't happened yet. I look forward to the day when it does. I don't expect to be alive though.

Michelle Harven: [02:36](#)

and of course this is not something that everyone agrees to. We brought this answer to Doug Brooks who's an expert and he's really helped shape the industry by creating the International Stability Operations Association and this is what he said in response to David Eisenberg,

Doug Brooks: [02:53](#)

look, you hire these companies cause they're faster, better or cheaper or some combination of those in many cases, all three. The private sector is a lot more nimble than militaries or than governments and that's a capability that governments can tap into and hire and so on. If a company's not cost effective, why would you hire them? I argue that 99.9% of the time it's always going to be cheaper using a contractor. It's not always what you want to do for a lot of reasons, but it's always going to be cheaper.

Michelle Harven: [03:24](#)

So we wanted to have sort of a final thought on this question of cost effectiveness. So we brought in Steve Schooner who is a professor of government procurement law and he's a former Army Reserve officer and was the associate administrator for procurement law and legislation at the office of federal procurement policy and the office of management and budget, which is a mouthful, but it's all to say that he's thought about this question a lot. So we asked him about this cost effective question, which has run throughout the series.

Steve Schooner: [03:54](#)

So it's really an interesting question. A lot of people have talked about this and there have been some empirical studies, but they're not really good. At the end of the day, I do not believe there's any empirical evidence that outsourcing is inherently cheaper or more expensive. And part of the problem is it's apples to oranges. And I think the best example I could give you, of that is the logcap contract, which was popularized during Iraq and Afghanistan, a generation from now, we may look

back at Iraq and Afghanistan and military historians may say that the single most significant advance in military history was not drones and it wasn't cyber, but it was the outsourcing. It was the literal ability of the government to turn to a contractor and say, look, I need somebody to support me wherever I fight in the world. I can't tell you in advance where, what the weather's going to be, what the threat condition is going to be. But today, the United States military can project and sustain lethality around the world more effectively than any nation ever has in the history of the world. It's expensive. And as you know, many commanders were complaining that their troops were coming home overweight or they were spending too much time in the gym because the food was too good. But at the end of the day, we are paying a price premium for surge capacity and flexibility and a quality of support for the troops that no military has ever had before. So you can't compare that to the military that I grew up in where boys in green basically did the cooking and the laundry in the mail service. It's just, it's a, it's apples and oranges.

Desmon Farris: [05:26](#)

So we're going to continue with Steve because one of his areas of focus is contractor fatalities, which is another form of costs when you really think about it. It's something we've touched on but certainly deserves a little bit more discussion. Let's hear what he had to say.

Steve Schooner: [05:40](#)

I think this is one of the most significant issues today with regard to contractors and I think it's an issue that's evolved outside of the public consciousness and I think that's really a bad thing. The reality is that as we've outsourced and the government has become more reliant on contractors, particularly the military, the military today can't move, fight, communicator, sustain without a fully integrated contractor presence. But what the public isn't aware is we've also outsourced sacrifice. And one of the most interesting studies I've seen is a study by Rand a number of years ago that talks about the issue of casualty sensitivity. And what Rand demonstrated in the public doesn't really appreciate and the media surely doesn't appreciate, is that the public really doesn't care what war costs. They really only want to know two things. Are we winning or losing and how many of our boys or girls are coming home in bags and

boxes that what the public cares about. So against that backdrop, as we have outsourced sacrifice, the public has no idea what the human cost of our military efforts abroad are. For a number of years in Iraq and Afghanistan, more contractors were dying every year than boys and girls in uniform. And the public doesn't realize it. Now forget this administration, but even the Obama administration refused to use the word contractor on Memorial day and generally did not want to acknowledge this. Now, I'm not saying it's intentional, but the government in effect gets a more flexible public reaction in terms of casual sensitivity because we've dramatically reduced the number of men and women in uniform who are dying and being injured in combat, and that brunt is being borne by contractors. Now, before I go too far afield, it's worse than that. It's not just that more contractors are dying, but the injury issue is horrific. If you have a member of the military in uniform standing next to a contractor and they both lose a leg to an IED, the member of the military will come home to the military hospital system and spend the rest of his or her life being cared for by the VA medical system. The contractor is going to be left on the tarmac and the government has achieved one of the great economic bargains of the modern marketplace.

Desmon Farris: [07:55](#)

This leads us into another form of cost effectiveness, which is third country nationals. These are all the workers who aren't US citizens, but are working for the US companies or the US cause in one way or another. And in some cases these workers are the majority.

Michelle Harven: [08:11](#)

And just to put this workforce into perspective, just last year in 2018 over half of the DOD contractor personnel in Iraq and Syria or either these third country or host country nationals.

Desmon Farris: [08:25](#)

And when Steve made his report on contractor casualties public, he struggled with the response he received on these non-US deaths.

Steve Schooner: [08:33](#)

The pushback I got because people only cared about Americans was flabbergasting. I mean there are people who honestly don't care about people who aren't American dying or being injured, supporting the Americans so they don't care if they're allies. Um, but I mean it's, it's just a

remarkable thing. It seems to me that if we rely on people to perform our mission, they're us. That's our team. And we have to kind of get to that. The reality is the military was always highly integrated. Anybody who's been in the military in the modern era knows that we are fully integrated with our allies. We are international, we are multicultural. We have, I think in many ways we're moving in the right directions on gender and related issues. But I do think that we've seen exactly how incendiary some of those issues are. And I think that makes all of this more complicated.

Desmon Farris: [09:32](#)

Matthew Lowe runs the blog Feral Jundi, an insider's account of the industry and a place for the community to come together. He's a former Marine infantryman and current security contractor. He dedicates a portion of the blog to contractor casualties.

Matthew Lowe: [09:47](#)

We've reached over 4,000 deaths, contractor deaths in these wars since 9/11. It's 4,000 people. You know, they have friends, family loved ones. I'll say this, too: department of labor, they only mentioned the 4,000 contractors there killed. Of those 4,000, I'd say most of them were interpreters that were killed. These are Iraqi and Afghan contract interpreters who worked for the troops out in the field who you know, were absolutely essential to connecting with the local populations. And these interpreters, uh, risked a lot and they, they got killed, they got wounded. And that's a huge portion of the deaths. But the other thing I want to mention too, because of the international aspect of contracting is the deaths not mentioned. I would put the number probably several thousand more that were killed just because they're not, they don't follow it under the auspice of a defense base act. They're contractors that let's say work for the Canadian embassy or you know, whatnot. So they don't fall under that kind of reporting scheme. So even the DBA report that's great for, you know, as far as registering, uh, contracts that fall under DVA, but everything else has been involved with this war as far as deaths and injuries, I have no idea. I don't know how many we got up there, uh, by uh, speculate. It's a lot more than what we're seeing just with those

- Desmon Farris: [11:28](#) numbers when we come back. The role of contracting and America's intelligence advice from current security contractors and more. Hello, it's me, Desmond Ferris, you know me as the current cohost of force for hire. I want to introduce you to the next podcast by stars and stripes titled military matters. I will be coming back to you with a new cohost, army reserve -warrant officer Rod Rodriguez and we will discuss topical issues, interesting military related stories and events. You'll want to tune in for a unique perspective brought to you by an air force veteran, myself, and a soldier who is still serving together. We'll focus on topics that matter most to you, the worldwide military community. Look for the Military Matters podcast later this fall. Can't wait for you to listen.
- Michelle Harven: [12:25](#) one thing we didn't get to in our series, which I think really deserves some time is just how much contracting is used in the DOD's intelligence. So we met up with Tim Shorrock, who's a journalist and author of spies for hire. He's been researching this topic for a while and here's what he learned.
- Tim Shorrock: [12:44](#) So there was a sort of, you know, network of contracting companies in intelligence that already had been set up in the late 1990s and of course, you know everything changed after 2001 and 9/11 and the attacks on New York and Washington. And suddenly over the next two years, intelligence budgets increased drastically. Huge amounts of money were poured into the, um, you know, intelligence apparatus overall. And you know, of course defense budgets, uh, went up as well. Uh, and that's when these, these agencies rather than, you know, again, building up their own agencies, they went to the private sector and hired contractors for some immediate needs. We know the NSA really expanded its capabilities and a lot of that was being done, you know, by contractors by that time. So there was kind of an explosion of the use of contractors after, after 9/11 and it's steadily, it's steadily increased, you know, throughout the wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan.
- Michelle Harven: [13:56](#) So this was a reaction to a crisis and then it became a trend.
- Tim Shorrock: [14:02](#) It became a trend. Yeah. Rather than, rather than, you know, train cadres of, you know, government

employees to do these, to do this work. A lot of agencies thought, well, I guess, you know, they weren't thinking that long term and they thought, well, the way they had under this immediate need to take care of. And so they, you know, brought in brought in contractors, but it became more or less a permanent, a permanent situation.

Michelle Harven: [14:26](#)

And do we know right now how much of our intelligence is outsourced or those types of numbers out there?

Tim Shorrock: [14:34](#)

There aren't they aren't out there. Right. I still think I have the only document that laid out a, this was what, 2006 or 7 document from the defense intelligence agency. It was by the way an unclassified document. It wasn't a public document but it wasn't a secret document. That was actually a document that was provided to me by someone who was at a defense intelligence agency conference on acquisition. And someone from the actually, from the NSA gave a presentation and parts of her presentation were, were leaked to me and, and there was this pie chart that said 70% of the money went to private. The private sector is 70% of the intelligence budget. And I had been by that at that time I had been looking for such a figure for a few years and as intelligence budgets, you know, go up over time. If you just say if the, you know, I think the budget now, if you add everything, it's probably about a hundred billion. So I would say, you know, we probably spend about \$70 billion a year on intelligence contractors.

Michelle Harven: [15:43](#)

So the former head of US national intelligence, James clapper is a form of Booz Allen executive, right along with the current director of national intelligence, Joseph Maguire. So, and that's along with other top CIA and NSA leaders. How typical is this for public officials to go back and forth between public and private?

Tim Shorrock: [16:05](#)

It's very typical now, but you know, interestingly this, this trend of people leaving high level defense and intelligence jobs for the private sector in, you know, the defense sector and intelligence sector. It's fairly recent. It's only been, you know, in the last, I guess, you know, 40 years or so and now it's a flood and now it's like, it's not only revolving door, it's a spinning door because now people go from

government to private sector and then they go back to the government. And then there's not enough information really about what kind of, you know, uh, how much they have to divulge about what they, their dealings with those companies. And there's this whole gray area in there. And I think that's another way, another place where our oversight system is, is very poor.

Michelle Harven: [16:54](#)

So there's a blurred line right now.

Tim Shorrock: [16:56](#)

Very blurred. Yeah.

Desmon Farris: [16:59](#)

and of course we couldn't come all this way without talking about the future of contracting. This is one of the main questions we've been looking at for the entire series. What do these trends mean for the next generation?

Michelle Harven: [17:12](#)

So we brought on Dr. Andreas Krieg, he's an assistant professor at the school of security at Kings college London. And recently he co-wrote this book, surrogate warfare, the art of war in the 21st century. And so he's been grappling with this question for a while as well.

Andreas Krieg: [17:29](#)

So while in the past, traditionally the state would conventionally rely on the soldier and the armed forces, the military as a lever of power and war. Today, the state is engaging in a much more complex, much more, a much wider scope of operations that include, uh, technological surrogates such as cyber surrogates like bots and trolls online or um, any kind of cyber weapon, uh, drones which are increasingly autonomous as well as human surrogates of which could be, you know, in searching crew but terrorist organization, a rebel group and militia group, um, or even, you know, the private military and security industry because that is a very big and growing component of that kind of assemblage that we argue the state is building in order to fight a kind of complex, everywhere, forever wars of the 21st century.

Desmon Farris: [18:25](#)

And Andreas talked about the consequences of relying on surrogate warfare.

Andreas Krieg: [18:30](#)

During the delegation process, the state increasingly loses control because surrogates are

looking for more autonomy. And you know, as we introduced automatic weapons systems, automated weapon system, um, you know, even these weapon systems will increasingly become more and more autonomous. And we see that also with a private military and security industry, they try to obviously get contracts where they can do as you know, behave as they see fit without massive government control or state control if the state has declined. Um, and so in this kind of context, the state increasingly loses control, thereby loses control in the long term, also, over these kinds of conflicts. Cause the more you delegate, the more you externalize the burden of war. Those who bear the burden of war will eventually, uh, own the war and also dictate the outcome of these wars.

Desmon Farris: [19:18](#)

Let's not forget about, another big issue Andreas is looking at is the weaponization of misinformation which he sees being led by contractors.

Andreas Krieg: [19:28](#)

I'm looking particularly at the weaponization of narratives and the use of cyber of cyber subversion and I think contractors and, uh, surrogates obviously play a very important role in this. Moving forward, I think that, um, any subversive operations, you know, psychological operations of information warfare, which is entirely about trying to manipulate the information environment is something that will become of increasing importance. And we've seen how the Russians are doing it and they're doing it very effectively. And I think that the, the West will no longer just focus on defensive and strategic communications, but increasingly also on, on the use of uh, information, disinformation, misinformation in a, in an effort to subvert, um, you know, uh, particular audiences and in that kind of, this kind of behavior requires, again, expertise of companies and contractors. It requires surrogates in the, in the, in the cyberspace, in the social media sphere. And I do think that are contractors will be, will be playing a very important role, you know, but obviously they will not be in uniform or they will not be carrying arms and they'll be involved in what most people would call a subthreshold war. But I think this will be a, a bigger component moving forward. Again, the future of contracting does not mean by the use of physical violence or the employment or the potential employment of kinetic force. I think, you

know, as the, the breadth and the scope of war expands and widens, I think contractors and companies will offer some wider and broader services of which we today might think of being not irrelevant for the military or irrelevant for warfare and will become increasingly relevant in the future.

Michelle Harven: [21:17](#)

So we did recently talk about cyber in one of our recent episodes, but there are still so many ways cyber can influence warfare and how contractors can be used in this space. And one of those ways is something we didn't get to, which is cyber auxiliaries, which the Marine Corps is announcing as a volunteer group of cyber professionals who can train Marines to increase their war readiness. And it's one of the many ways the military is hoping to close this gap in their cyber workforce.

Desmon Farris: [21:47](#)

Mark Cancian is a senior advisor at the center for strategic and international studies and explains this idea further and why some have come out against this program.

Mark Cancian: [21:57](#)

One of the things that's been driving the push towards contractors and the increasing reliance on contractors is the cost and scarcity of military personnel. If you want to have an all volunteer force, you have to pay a market rate. And as labor becomes more expensive in the economy, you have to pay more and more for military personnel. So as a result, this gap opens between the number of military personnel you can afford and the number that you need. So you've seen that in theater with contractors, but you also see it with special skills like cyber. And my argument with cyber was that the Marine Corps and the department of defense need those skills, but they don't need them. In the military. With contractors, you have a much more flexible personnel system. You can hire people that are old, you can hire people that are overweight, you can hire people that are in poor health, you can have a diabetic, for example. Um, much more flexible. You can pay them more. They don't have to subject themselves to military discipline. And you don't get into those problems about, um, changing military standards and changing military expectations. You can keep a traditional military discipline for those personnel that need it. But then you can also get these other skills with this more flexible personnel system.

Michelle Harven: [23:23](#)

And so what's the argument against that?

Mark Cancian: [23:26](#)

I mean, some people I think have confused having people in the military with having the capability. In other words, they've believed that if you want to have cyber capability, you have to put them in uniform. And I said, I disagree with that. Um, I think there were some people who think that the future of warfare is changing and therefore the notion of someone sitting at a keyboard as a military person fighting a war, um, is consistent with this new view of conflict. And I disagree with that. Department of Defense disagrees with that. Secretary Mattis disagreed with that. Uh, but there, that view has been out there for a long time and really for about 50 years,

Desmon Farris: [24:05](#)

you may remember our interview with Erik Prince where he talked about his plan to partially privatize the war in Afghanistan. While looking to the future of contracting, Mark says Erik's idea is something the US may still consider.

Mark Cancian: [24:18](#)

United States is in a very tough spot with Afghanistan. That is, uh, the American people. And president Trump and many of the democratic presidential candidates are tired of the war they want out. On the other hand, the Afghan government is very weak and might collapse if we pull out and the Taliban sense that they're winning and they are not compromising at all. So what do you do in that situation? We tried peace negotiations with the Taliban, but it was clear that they would just not going to give us the kind of assurances that we needed. Every Prince, of course, two years ago comes forward with this proposal to turn a large part of the war over to contractors. Contracts is what operate under the Afghan government but would provide long-term support to the Afghan government. So that may be a way out of this conundrum. I doubt if we're ever going to make an announcement out of the white house, you know, Erik Prince's brought on, been brought on board to run the Afghan war. But I wouldn't be surprised if as we cut back forces that you saw the number of contractors starting to rise to compensate and that has the great advantage in that they're much less visible. And you can argue about whether that should be or shouldn't be, but it is true contract is much less visible than military

and that might be a way for the US to get the visibility of the war down but still make a long-term commitment to the African.

Desmon Farris: [25:57](#)

Let's finish with some security contractors who are working in the field today and what they'll tell those who are interested in the work.

Michelle Harven: [26:05](#)

And so let's start with Neil Reynolds. He's a South African security contractor and he wrote the book in the kill zone surviving as a private military contractor in Iraq and he's been in the industry since 2001

Neil Reynolds: [26:19](#)

if I speak to a military guard today, I would say, You stay in the military. Contracting work is just what it is. Contracting works and the contracts are getting less and less and less. When the contract is finished, your contract finishes and that doesn't mean you're going to have another contract. And in 2004, 2005, pilot security guards were well paid. Today's private security guards are getting half of what the guys in the old days used to get and even less, uh, the going rates used to be between 10 and \$13,000. Today the going rate is between 4 and \$7,000. And if you've got a \$7,000, you on on a pretty good contract. This is in the middle East. In Africa, There are some contacts that are buying better, but they're also far and few between. And the guards have got to be highly qualified, and the normal military guards are not gonna get in. The other thing, the industry has changed in that way. Then we first came out, there were no, uh, PhD courses and qualifications that that one could get. Nowadays, it's changed. You want to get into industry you have got to go out and do an official course that is internationally recognized and they are fairly expensive. The guards with medical have to do a medical course and have all the qualifications. So it's, it's become a, you got to have the proper qualifications to get into the industry in the first place, even if you got a military background. So yeah, the industry is definitely changed and you know, you don't have a pension, you know, you don't have medical aid. You don't have anything when you leave. The most important thing is look after yourself.

Desmon Farris: [28:15](#)

now we turn back to Matthew Lowe who runs the blog feral Jundi. He says he often gets asked for

advice from people around the world on how to get started.

Matthew Lowe: [28:25](#)

I try to be as realistic as I can with them. I'm not going to sugar coat. Ah, it's an interesting industry to get involved with. Um, unfortunately I've, I've actually helped guys get jobs in the past who were killed on contracts and that is absolutely, um, it's a hard thing to think about sometimes. But what's interesting about, you know, when you help someone again in this industry is they're doing something they want to do. They, they have this drive that want to get into contracting. I mean I have guys who don't have military backgrounds who want to get into contracting and I help them, I'll point them in the right direction. Usually for those guys, I'll tell them, you need to go in the military. Cause most of the companies, they want that four years combat arms degree. You know, I call that the arms degree because literally guys with an infantry background with combat time in Iraq or Afghanistan or both are very valuable folks to the companies. And then I've also helped people with absolutely zero background in the military, get into contracting. Uh, that's takes a lot more work, a little bit more luck. But if you're, and that's the key to this work is persistence is power. That's probably the thing for everything you do in life. Uh, you eventually get that contract. Um, but I also say too that, uh, you know, we are still heavily involved with combating terrorism all throughout the world and wherever we're going to be doing that, contractors are going to be needed to support that effort. So contract's not going to go away any time soon.

Desmon Farris: [30:11](#)

Preston McIntyre was in the air force for over five years and then went into private security contracting. Now Preston is a senior policy advisor with companies in the UAE and he sees one mistake made over and over again by new contractors,

Preston McIntyr: [30:24](#)

a lot of, um, former military contractors that come here and other places and other locations. Um, when, when they, when they get to the location, they kind of keep this mentality of military in a sense. And that, that transition to be able to go to a civilian and then looking towards what else is out there is always kind of narrow. And what happens is

you see a lot of contractors that hop from one location to the next. They go from contract to contract to contract, and they go around and around and around and they just end up kind of in this little, uh, this, this, this, this hamster wheel. And this the same thing to me as a rat race or the same thing to me as being in the military. And a lot of times there's a lot of contractors that can, they'll get to a location, especially if they're younger. And, um, for instance, if they're here in the UAE, they'll party hard and all these things and, and then they'll lose, they will lose everything and they'll also lose face. And um, what they don't understand is that they're not necessarily, uh, um, um, supported by this safety net that they would have in the military to where you're always gonna have a check, you're always gonna have a job and they end up, um, losing those positions and, and sometimes causing problems for the contract itself. And, um, and, and they don't know how to separate the two from, um, knowing that the military now is a customer and a client as opposed to being, you being still in the military, they separated completely. That's one of the hardest things for people to do is the adjustment.

- Michelle Harven: [32:03](#) We want to thank everyone who has come on the show to talk about and address some of the important topics facing contracting today.
- Desmon Farris: [32:11](#) I'd also like to thank the many who shared their personal life stories. These stories gave you a deeper dive and what their lives were like in the private military contracting field. Those thank-yous go out once again to Adam Gonzalez, Barbie Baker and Nicole Woodland, Evan Hafer, Cindy Waldron, Tim Lynch, Colonel Tim Collins, Chris Hoare, Amir Mohammed, Amanda and Tammy Frost, Johann Ross, Kimberley Motley and Neryl Joyce.
- Michelle Harven: [32:37](#) Yes, we want to thank everyone who shared their story. They were all so very personal, but I think they, they mean a lot and they'll be important for other people to hear.
- Speaker 6: [32:47](#) Right. And I'd also like to thank our listeners, you know, their continued support from week to week, you know, input, comments. It was all very much appreciated.

- Michelle Harven: [32:57](#) Yeah, thank you for coming on the journey with us and we hope that we did actually shed some light on some of these things and that it was valuable to some people.
- Desmon Farris: [33:08](#) Don't forget to subscribe and while you're there leave us a review. You can also let us know your thoughts at podcast@stripes.com. Also follow us on Twitter for updates at stars and stripes,
- Michelle Harven: [33:20](#) forced for hires. Supervising editors are Bob Reid and Terry Leonard. Digital team lead and editor is Michael Darnell.
- Desmon Farris: [33:27](#) Thanks for listening. This is Force for hire.